

68th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference: Official Opening
Theme: “*The Commonwealth - A Global Partner*”

Bridgetown, Barbados | 5 to 12 October 2025

Speech: Commonwealth Secretary-General, Hon. Shirley Botchwey
Tuesday 7 October 2025

The Honourable Senator Reginald Farley, Chair of the 68th Commonwealth
Parliamentary Conference,
Madame Prime Minister,
Madame President,
Honourable Dr Kalila,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Colleagues & Friends.

It is a privilege to be with you in Bridgetown for the opening of the 68th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference. I must make a confession. The Bridgetown Initiative, named after this city, inspires my vision for the transformation of development cooperation, and I feel that it is the right place, in the time we live in, for this conference.

I thank the Government and people of Barbados for their generous welcome, and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association for its tireless work to strengthen democracy across our family of nations.

This conference comes at a defining moment. Around the world, we see overlapping pressures: conflict and insecurity; rising inequality, debt and poverty; the mounting climate crisis; and growing attacks on, and erosion of trust in, institutions and in democracy itself.

These are not isolated challenges. They feed and worsen each other. And they cannot be solved by any nation standing alone. So, as this moment is defined by uncertainty and drift, the Commonwealth must be defined by purpose.

Fifty-six nations. One-third of humanity. A family bound by shared values - democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights - and by the conviction that when we stand together, we can turn vulnerability into resilience, opportunity into shared prosperity.

That conviction is at the heart of our new Commonwealth Strategic Plan, which our nations - through your governments - with the support of Commonwealth institutions and accredited organisations - have helped shape and approve.

It focuses on building resilience: democratic, economic and environmental. And it recognises that making investments in our people, especially women and young people, and giving them the skills for the future of work and for entrepreneurship, is key to safeguarding our democracies, building resilience and realising the democratic dividend.

My vision and strategy for delivery is to ensure that the Commonwealth is not only relevant, but indispensable in meeting the needs of our time. And I am here because of a simple and vital truth: our work cannot succeed without you.

The Commonwealth is an association of nations - but it is also, crucially, an association of Parliaments. Governments propose, but it is Parliaments that debate, amend and decide.

You scrutinise budgets, ratify treaties, pass laws that give life to our commitments, and hold the Executive to account. Through public hearings you enable effective participation by the people. Indeed, we cannot today ensure public support for multilateral solutions without parliamentary hearings. You embody the democratic values that lie at the very heart of our Charter.

At a time when democracy is under strain, your role is more important than ever. Strong, inclusive, accountable Parliaments are the foundation on which all our ambitions rest.

Without them, there can be no trust, no legitimacy, and no progress. That is why the CPA's work is so vital - building capacity, sharing best practice, empowering women and young Parliamentarians, and defending the integrity of our democratic institutions. And it is why, as Secretary-General, I see you as essential partners in delivering the Commonwealth's vision:

- Partners in strengthening democracy where it is fragile, including through election observation.
- Partners in eliminating trade barriers among Commonwealth countries, promoting digital trade, and targeting investments in the countries that need them.
- Partners in reforming international debt treatment and concessionary funding, with vulnerability, including climate, at its centre.
- Partners in leading the global push for climate justice, and for a renewable energy revolution.
- Partners in ensuring that millions of our young people receive digital skills and training in entrepreneurship through amply funded distance learning.

Honourable Members, We live in an age of turbulence. But it is also an age of possibility. With shared purpose, we can transform the vulnerabilities of small and fragile states into examples of resilience. We can turn the Commonwealth's trade advantage into a platform for inclusive growth.

We can show the world that multilateralism works - that nations, and Parliaments, can come together to solve problems that no one can solve alone. That is the power of the Commonwealth. That is the promise of this conference. So let us use this gathering to reaffirm our shared values, to exchange ideas and innovations, and to strengthen the bonds between us.

Let us leave Bridgetown with renewed energy, not only to debate the future, but to shape it. Because the world needs hope. It needs cooperation. It needs solutions. And the Commonwealth - through its Parliaments, its governments, and its people - can provide all three.

Thank you.

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